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ABSTRACT

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) collaborates with community colleges in rural communities that are racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse by challenging them to think broadly about their potential as catalysts for regional development. RCCI is a national demonstration program that combines the goals of rural development and access to education, providing funding and technical assistance to 24 colleges in 1998. This booklet outlines RCCI principles, discusses strategies of access to education and economic development, and describes the place of community colleges in the community-wide collaborative process. The foundations for economic development are briefly described in terms of strategic planning and the role of the community college. Roles for community colleges to assume in local economic development are explained: regional leadership; workforce development in collaboration with employers; promotion of technology transfer, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and small business development; poverty-targeted programming; and encouragement of a strong education ethic. Outlined are expanded and more aggressive strategies by which community colleges can increase access both to education and to the opportunities created through education. These strategies focus on partnerships with secondary schools, disadvantaged students, nontraditional programs, and distance learning. Essential institutional capacities and characteristics are listed, and the college-community collaboration process is discussed. (SAS)

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ED 422 146

RCCI

Rural Community College Initiative

Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas

A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative

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Foreword

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) is a national demonstration that helps community colleges in distressed regions move their people and communities toward prosperity. It challenges community colleges to become catalysts for economic development, and supports aggressive and creative efforts to increase access to education in rural communities.

Rural America has more than 700 community colleges, one in four located in economically distressed areas from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta, from the Texas-Mexican border to northern New Mexico and the Indian reservations of the West. The RCCI aims to enhance the capacity and visibility of these institutions so they can increase educational and economic opportunities for their people and communities.

In 1993 the Ford Foundation began planning for a national demonstration program that combined the goals of rural development and access to education. The Foundation made the first RCCI grants in 1995, and in 1998-99, 24 colleges are receiving funding and technical assistance.

In addition to stimulating local demonstration activities, RCCI is building a network of rural community colleges and tribal colleges to help reduce their isolation and provide a forum for sharing ideas. RCCI also seeks to raise the profile of rural community colleges within the higher education, economic development, and philanthropic communities. And it aims to make state and national policy more supportive of rural community colleges as agents for community renewal.

The RCCI is a partnership among the participating colleges, MDC, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the Ford Foundation. Two divisions of the Ford Foundation ("Asset Building and Community Development" and "Education, Media, Arts, and Culture") have made a ten-year commitment to the program. The Initiative is managed by MDC, a nonprofit organization that conducts research and manages demonstration projects in economic development and workforce development. Consultation to demonstration sites is provided by national experts on rural education and economic development. Documentation and assessment of RCCI is being conducted by AACC. In conjunction with RCCI, the Ford Foundation is funding a book on rural community colleges by Stephen Katsinas and Vincent Lacey with Timm J. Bliss, entitled *On the Fault Line: America's Rural Community Colleges.*

This paper presents the vision for RCCI, developed at the outset of the Initiative and revised in 1998 to reflect experiences at the demonstration sites. As the Initiative unfolds over the coming years, its partners will continue to refine the model presented here. We welcome your comments.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Economic Development 4

Access to Educational Opportunity 9

Essential Institutional Capacities 14

A Process for College-Community Collaboration 17

Introduction

The Rural Challenge

Rural America in the 1990s is a study in contrasts. While some regions and communities are thriving, many are struggling to survive and others suffer persistent poverty in the midst of prosperity.

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) focuses on economically distressed communities. Many have lost their historic job base of mining, farming, timber, or low-wage manufacturing. Some are Indian reservations that have been unable to develop viable economic systems. Still other RCCI communities face a different challenge: rapid growth threatens to overwhelm traditional culture, while low-income residents fail to reap the benefits of an expanding economy.

These communities are diverse racially, ethnically, and culturally as well as economically. Their populations include Appalachians, African Americans and whites in the Deep South, many Indian nations, Mexican-Americans and other Hispanics in the Southwest. Despite their differences, RCCI communities share rich cultural traditions and strong values of family and community. They also share common economic and social challenges.

In all these regions, education levels are low. Many young people drop out of school; others leave home after high school or college for lack of job opportunities. Community development efforts struggle to combat the sense of powerlessness that comes from absentee ownership of land and resources, a one-industry economy, and high dependence on government programs and transfer payments. And many communities are divided by conflicts between racial or ethnic groups, between rich and poor, or between natives and newcomers.

Rural people deserve opportunities to participate in America's prosperity. And rural communities have few institutions other than community colleges that can help build a viable economy and educate people for a better life.

The Rural Community College Initiative helps community colleges in distressed areas move their people and communities toward prosperity. The Initiative challenges colleges to think broadly about their potential as catalysts for regional development. It does not impose a particular set of programs or strategies to solve regional problems; rather, it fosters a climate of innovation that will spark local solutions. The RCCI helps colleges, in partnership with their communities, develop effective strategies for economic development and educational access — a process that we believe can put their regions and their people on the road toward economic renewal.

RCCI Principles

The RCCI is grounded in five principles which undergird the work of participating colleges and their communities.

1. ***Rural America matters.*** Rural communities are the source of our natural resources as well as many of our values. The heart of America must remain healthy if the body is to survive.

2. ***Healthy communities focus on their assets.*** Rural America is home to rich cultural traditions and diverse natural environments. Successful communities nurture and build on their natural and human assets to promote prosperity. The RCCI seeks development that is compatible with the valued heritage of rural communities.

3. ***Change begins with self-assessment.*** The divides of geography, race, wealth, and culture are particular threats to fragile rural communities. A willingness to address community problems and work for institutional change is central to the RCCI.

4. ***Effective change requires collaboration.*** Rural communities are diverse and need to pay particular attention to building institutional collaboration, eschewing internal competition, broadening leadership, and promoting shared decision-making. RCCI strengthens partnerships between the college and the community and brings new voices to the table.

5. ***Equity and high expectations should undergird education and economic development goals.*** A commitment to equity means guaranteeing all people — rural and urban, rich and poor — access to high quality education and training, with support to help them succeed in school and in the economy.

Strategic Directions: Economic Development and Access to Education

The RCCI stresses economic development and access to education as concurrent goals because both are needed to revitalize distressed rural areas.

- ***Economic development*** can create jobs, income, and wealth. But economic development often fails to benefit poor people. Even in a growing economy, people who lack education and skills required by an increasingly demanding workplace will not get good jobs. Similarly, even in a thriving region, lack of access to capital and business know-how prevents many potential entrepreneurs from starting successful businesses.

- ***Education and training*** are essential to help individuals gain access to good jobs, wherever they choose to live. But without a strong economy, most high school and college graduates must leave their communities to find work.

- ***The link between economic development and access to education*** is especially important in poor rural regions. In these places, low levels of educational attainment and high poverty are barriers to development that must be addressed directly if the economy is to thrive.

Why Community Colleges?

Rural community colleges and tribal colleges are uniquely positioned to be catalysts for increasing economic and educational opportunity in their communities. They are "common ground" institutions, respected by the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and trusted by all social classes. They can be a safe, neutral place for mobilizing community engagement and building social capital, a foundation for community prosperity. They have the stature, the stability, and the flexibility to provide leadership for regional development.

Community colleges are active on both the supply and demand side of the labor market, working to create jobs while preparing people to fill those jobs. Indeed, they are the only institutions with the capacity for both *place-based* economic development and *people-based* education and training strategies.

As flexible institutions with a broad mission, community colleges have the potential to build bridges within their communities and regions. For young people, they can bridge the gap between high school and postsecondary education or work. For adults, they can provide links to basic education, occupational training, a baccalaureate degree, and good jobs. Community colleges can connect employers with qualified workers, cutting-edge technology, and improved forms of workplace organization. And they can link potential entrepreneurs with resources for successful business operation.

A Collaborative Process

Community colleges cannot, however, do it alone. By participating in RCCI, colleges embark on an intensive process to strengthen themselves and their regions. This task calls for broad-based, collaborative efforts by college and community.

To achieve the ambitious goals of the initiative, each site creates a leadership team with members representing the college and the community. The team analyzes economic opportunities and educational needs in the region and develops a strategic plan to guide RCCI efforts. It draws in key partners from the college and the community to help make the resulting vision a reality.

This team-led collaborative process is important for three reasons. First, it results in a plan that addresses issues of serious concern to the community. Second, it generates the energy needed to implement the plan. And finally, it models the kind of broad-based, inclusive leadership that characterizes successful communities. The process can set an example for other community initiatives in the future.

Economic Development

In the RCCI, "economic development" means creating jobs, raising incomes, generating wealth, and reinvesting that wealth in the region's businesses, institutions, and people. It means increasing the overall level of economic activity in the region — creating opportunities for people to start and operate profitable businesses, do productive work, and raise their standard of living. And it means targeting economic opportunity to people who have been left out.

Each community or region needs to define the kind of development it seeks based on the values of its people, its assets — including natural and human resources, cultural resources, and existing economic strengths — and its constraints or weaknesses. It is not always easy for a community to agree on a vision for developing its economy. Many communities debate the trade-offs between growth and environmental or cultural preservation. In some rural communities, including Indian reservations, there is deep-rooted ambivalence toward a capitalistic, money-centered economy. Before signing on to an economic development agenda, people want to know how it will lead to a better life.

It is the expectation that each community in the RCCI will define economic development in harmony with local values and set appropriate goals that will lead toward prosperity.

The Foundation for Development

Economic development efforts often focus on business development — encouraging the start-up of new businesses, expansion of existing businesses, and recruitment of businesses to the region. But in many rural communities, the foundation for business development must first be put in place. That foundation includes technology and capital; a high-quality labor force; a culture of entrepreneurship; sound physical infrastructure; and strong civic infrastructure, including broad-based leadership, good schools, health care, child care, and strong community organizations.

In the past, rural communities have focused their economic development efforts on exploiting the natural resource base or recruiting industries, often marketing cheap land and labor as a primary asset. In this era of global competition — where the critical elements in economic development are a flexible, well-trained workforce, access to technology and capital, and a strong civic infrastructure — those old approaches will not yield positive, sustainable results.

Today's successful communities are those that help their existing businesses become more productive and competitive, as well as assisting new business start-ups. Successful rural communities work to strengthen their foundation for development, especially their civic infrastructure. And they take a regional approach, viewing economic development as a process of collaboration rather than competition.

Thinking Strategically

"Job creation" is the usual goal of local economic development programs. RCCI urges rural communities to delve deeper in setting their goals, asking themselves "What outcomes do we seek?" Objectives might include diversification of the economy, greater local ownership of businesses, higher skill/higher wage jobs, drawing new income to the region, or targeting development efforts on the poorest citizens. Different objectives point to different strategic approaches.

If job creation is the central objective, it is important to recognize that not all jobs are created equal. This is true not just in terms of job quality (for instance, wages, benefits, job security, occupational safety) but also in terms of impact on the regional economy. The most important distinction is between "economic base" businesses that bring new income into the region and service/retail businesses that recirculate consumer dollars within the region.

Retail and service businesses typically serve local customers. As important as these firms are to rural communities — both for convenience (so people do not have to drive 50 miles to buy groceries) and preventing consumer dollars from leaking out of the region — an economy cannot be built on service businesses alone. Regional economies thrive or not based on their ability to export products (for instance, through manufacturing) and import dollars (for instance, through tourism). Regions that find ways to build their economic base will have a stronger economy in the long run.

How does a region go about building its economic base? Successful economic development efforts identify and build on the region's competitive advantages. These can include strengths such as existing industry clusters, workforce capabilities, and natural or cultural resources.

Economic Development Approaches for the Future

New economic realities in rural America demand new approaches to economic development. Rural development experts looking toward the next century urge communities to develop their human resources and a sound civic infrastructure, to assist new and existing businesses, and above all to take a collaborative, regional approach to development.

Typical Past and Current Approaches	Approaches for the Future
Heavy dependence on natural resource base — agriculture, extraction, and timber.	Economic development is based on intellectual, cultural, and civic resources.
Recruit industry, marketing cheap land, labor, and taxes.	Enhance productivity and competitiveness of existing business and workers; help new businesses start up. Strengthen the foundation for development.
Competition among adjacent towns and counties.	Regional approach that involves business and civic leaders across town and county lines.
Economic development priorities are often set by one or two agencies, in a process dominated by established interests.	Priorities emerge from collaborative process involving multiple agencies, with broad-based community participation and support.
Economic development focuses on increasing the number of jobs.	Economic development aims to raise the overall economic tide while also benefiting lower-income, lower wealth residents.

Economic Development: Roles for Community Colleges

Across the country; workforce education is community colleges' most widely recognized contribution to economic development. Colleges prepare workers for technical occupations, upgrade the literacy skills of adults in the workplace, and in many states, provide customized training for employers.

In addition to workforce preparation, there are several other ways in which community colleges can provide support and leadership for economic development. These are especially important in rural areas, where there are often few institutions other than the community college that can perform these functions.

RCCI urges rural colleges to consider how they can catalyze economic development in the following ways:

1. ***Provide regional leadership for economic development.*** One difference between a stagnant community and a community moving toward prosperity is strong, broad-based, and unified leadership. The community college can bring together leaders from business, government, education, agriculture, and community-based organizations and mobilize them to build an economic development agenda and work together toward common goals. The college can also be instrumental in nurturing new, broad-based leadership. In so doing, the community college is the catalyst for creation of social capital — the relationships and bonds of trust that are fundamental to sustained community and economic success.

   Some high poverty regions today face a new economic challenge — rapid growth in tourism or retirement threatens traditional culture and the natural environment, and often fails to create economic opportunity for low-income people. In these places, the community college can serve as a meeting ground that brings together old and new, and helps the region manage growth in a way that benefits natives as well as newcomers.

2. ***Be the center of a regional workforce development system attuned to employers' changing needs.*** The ideal community college works closely with employers to design and deliver high quality education and training at a variety of levels. These include: basic and advanced skills training for existing workers; customized training for expanding firms; workshops to help managers implement quality standards for the high performance workplace; training in teamwork and related skills to help workers adjust to new workplace demands.

3. ***Promote technology transfer and competitiveness.*** Just as the Extension Service has helped spread new agricultural technology among farmers during the 20th century, 21st century rural America needs an institution to help small and mid-sized businesses adopt new technologies. Community colleges can play an important role by organizing manufacturing networks, serving as brokers between firms and sources of specialized technical assistance, and developing programs tailored to key sectors in the local economy. These services, along with high quality workforce training, can have significant impact on the stabilization and expansion of local businesses.

4. ***Promote entrepreneurship and small business development.*** In distressed rural areas with few large employers, growing healthy small businesses is a particularly important economic development strategy. Many rural colleges already operate small business centers, and RCCI urges them to set high standards for the quality of the workshops and technical assistance they provide. Some rural colleges take a more proactive role by initiating business incubators, lending programs, and intensive entrepreneurship programs that help more people start and operate successful businesses.

5. ***Develop programs that target poor people while creating jobs.*** Too often, the fruits of the best-intended economic development efforts fail to reach the people who most need jobs and income. Some economic development strategies address this challenge head-on. These include: school-based enterprises (which teach entrepreneurship and business management skills while creating actual businesses based at a high school or community college); microenterprise programs for welfare recipients and other low-income people; youth community service programs (which provide education, job skills, and heightened self-esteem for participants while supporting community development efforts); and targeted job training for new and expanding industries (which gives poor people direct access to new jobs created as a result of successful economic development initiatives).

6. ***Encourage a strong education ethic.*** Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, most jobs in rural America required little formal education. The rural economy failed to provide an incentive for completing high school, let alone college. Today, the playing field has shifted — education is a prerequisite for both individual and community prosperity — but many people have not heard the message. Community colleges can be a powerful force for economic development by encouraging a strong education ethic in their regions.

Access to Educational Opportunity

Providing broad access to education is central to the community college movement, and community colleges pride themselves on extending an "open door" to all in their service area. Indeed, rural community colleges (as well as their urban sisters) serve a broad socio-economic cross-section of the population, and the colleges participating in RCCI serve large numbers of the rural poor.

There are particular populations, however, that face special barriers to education and employment; they are the people for whom "college" is often an alien idea and a forbidding institution. If they are to enroll and succeed in college programs and secure good jobs, the college needs to provide not just passive accessibility through open admissions and low tuition but active, aggressive outreach, counseling, support, and job placement.

For RCCI, the term "access" encompasses both access to the college and access through the college to expanded opportunities — including further education and productive, rewarding work. It calls for active attention to several populations:

- Middle school and high school students — especially those at risk of dropping out of high school and those enrolled in academically weak programs that prepare them neither for college nor for work.
- Community college students (including first generation college-goers) whose weak academic skills or need for support services threatens their success.
- Adults and out-of-school youth (including high school dropouts and welfare recipients) who are unemployed, marginally employed, or have given up looking for work.
- Adults in the workforce who need new skills, including recently dislocated workers and those in danger of losing their jobs due to changes in technology or workplace reorganization.
- People living in remote areas who seek education but cannot travel the long distance to the college campus.

Access to Education: Approaches for the Future

New economic realities in rural America demand an expanded definition of access.

Typical Past and Current Approaches	Approaches for the Future
"Open door" admissions.	Aggressive outreach to groups that need education and workforce preparation, including young high school dropouts, working and unemployed adults.
Primary goal is enrollment.	Multiple institutional goals emphasize positive outcomes for students, including retention, graduation, and placement in further education and jobs. College helps each student achieve his or her individual goals.
Emphasis on credentials — awarding of degrees and certificates.	Emphasis on competencies — learning what one needs now, while keeping the door open for future learning — as well as graduation and certification.
Emphasis on teaching.	Emphasis on learning — student-centered, individualized approach.
College relationship with students begins at age 18.	College works with middle and high schools to prepare more students for post-secondary education and raise the college-going rate in the region.
Enroll those who can travel to campus.	Extend classes to people in remote areas and at worksites.
College operates in isolation from other educational institutions.	Strong links with secondary schools and four-year colleges/universities.

Access: Roles for Community Colleges

RCCI urges colleges to be aggressive about increasing access to education, training, and productive and rewarding work. This means reaching out to disadvantaged populations and offering appropriate programs that take people from "where they are to where they want to be." RCCI colleges are increasing access to education in the following ways:

1. ***Building partnerships with secondary schools.*** Community colleges can play a powerful role in raising academic standards and achievement levels in middle schools and high schools. They can encourage more young people to prepare for and enroll in college, and they can help students make a successful transition to college and career. Proven strategies include: coordinating a high quality regional Tech Prep program; developing "bridge" programs that offer career education, academic enrichment, mentoring, and dropout prevention for middle and high school students; joint faculty development and curriculum development for the college and secondary schools; and dual enrollment courses which enable high school students to earn college credit.

2. ***Helping disadvantaged students achieve academic success.*** Economically and educationally disadvantaged students — who comprise most of the student body in many RCCI colleges — face barriers to academic success. To help them complete programs and advance to further education and jobs, the college needs to provide strong support services such as counseling, tutoring, mentoring, financial aid, child care, and transportation. The college may need to help faculty and staff learn new strategies for working with disadvantaged students. RCCI colleges are demonstrating several ways to help all students succeed in college:

    - *Address family and community barriers to education.* Many potential students never enroll in college programs — or enroll and drop out — because of family or community barriers. For instance, women may experience family resistance to their educational or career aspirations; students with family responsibilities may drop out when problems at home eclipse their studies. Some community colleges are beginning to view students holistically, in the context of family and community. Strategies for support include: on-campus child care centers; wellness centers; family literacy programs; and on-campus "one-stop centers" where students can get referrals to counseling and other human services. As important as specific strategies are faculty and staff who understand and support their students.

      An emerging concern at rural community colleges is the declining enrollment of male students. In some economies, men stay away from college because they can find work despite their low education levels. But increasingly in many rural areas, men languish unemployed and unemployable while women prepare themselves for an economic

future. Some colleges are experimenting with ways to draw in more male students, from marketing targeted to men to providing mentoring and support services for male students.

- *Help students move beyond developmental courses into college-level programs.* Many students who enter college with low academic skills never advance beyond developmental studies. This can change if the college integrates developmental studies with college-level courses and provides appropriate support for at-risk students. Strategies include: assigning outstanding teachers to develop-mental courses and encouraging communication between developmental and other faculty; after careful testing, integrating marginal students into regular classes augmented by tutoring and learning labs; teaching faculty how to use learner-centered methods that tap into students' differing learning styles.

- *Use culturally-based curriculum.* All students learn better when they feel valued, and for students from racial and ethnic minorities, this includes affirming their cultural heritage. Historically, Native Americans, Appalachians, Latinos, and other rural minority groups have seen their cultures belittled by educational institutions and disrupted by outsiders and newcomers to their regions. Tribal colleges in particular (as well as other rural community colleges) have shown how to integrate traditional culture into the curriculum in a way that makes education more meaningful and builds students' pride in themselves and their community. This in turn helps students succeed academically.

- *Ensure that community college students can transfer successfully to four-year institutions.* In low-income rural areas, a high proportion of students who seek a baccalaureate begin their college education at the community college. To help students transfer successfully to a baccalaureate program, the college must ensure high academic standards in transfer courses, work out articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities, and counsel students about their options.

3. ***Offering nontraditional programs to meet the needs of nontraditional students.*** With reduced federal support for job training and welfare programs, it is more important than ever for community colleges to reach out to hard-to-serve populations including high school dropouts, welfare mothers, and older, dislocated workers. Many of these adults are not presently candidates for traditional college curricula. They need job readiness preparation, improved literacy skills, and referral to other employment-related services. In many rural communities, the college is the only institution that can coordinate these services.

    - *Job readiness.* The community college, in conjunction with other community organizations, needs special staff to reach out to unemployed adults, to counsel them and refer them to programs tailored to their needs. The college may be the best place to provide the instruction

they need — including literacy and occupational skills, personal motivation and self-esteem, and job-seeking skills. Once they are employed, the college can link these adults to the continued education and training they need to advance beyond an entry-level job.

- *Adult literacy.* In many communities adult literacy programs are fragmented and unrelated to the demands of the workplace. Colleges should work with the local organizations that sponsor adult basic education to insure that programs are accessible, of high quality, and helpful in preparing adults for the workplace. Many rural community colleges offer literacy instruction in workplaces, tailored to the specific needs of workers and employers.

- *One-stop centers.* The hub of future employment and training programs will be one-stop centers that connect people to education, training, and employment. Community colleges are an ideal institution to house these centers since they have relationships with both job-seekers and employers, and they can provide both short-term and lifelong education and training.

4. ***Offering distance learning opportunities.*** In sparsely populated rural areas distance education is an especially useful tool for educational access. The community college can be a catalyst in forming distance education networks and helping partners obtain funding for telecommunications equipment. It can offer specialized college prep courses to isolated high schools, and can use telecommunications to link remote community centers and satellite campuses for classes and videoconferences. Through agreements with universities, rural community colleges can make baccalaureate and graduate level courses available to rural residents.

Essential Institutional Capacities

To be effective catalysts for regional development, community colleges need to do more than launch programs promoting economic development and access to education. They also need to look inward, honing their own ability to anticipate and respond to the needs of the people and communities they serve. They need to build partnerships with other organizations. And the college itself needs an institutional culture that supports innovation, risk-taking, and learning.

RCCI urges rural colleges to ask themselves how they measure up against the following ideal and to work toward strengthening these essential capacities:

1. ***A clear institutional mission that encompasses economic development and broad access to education.*** More than simply having the right words in its mission statement, the college has a deep institutional commitment to the goals of economic development and access. That commitment begins with the president, emanates throughout the administration and faculty, and is shared by the board. College policies support these dual goals, for instance, by providing incentives for faculty and staff to engage in community service projects.

2. ***Strong partnerships with the community.*** The college works collaboratively with elementary and secondary schools, economic development organizations, employers, local governments, and community organizations. Community members advise the college on its programs and vice versa; there are many collaborative initiatives involving the college and other institutions. In the words of one RCCI team member, "The college is the community, and the community is the college."

3. ***Capable faculty and staff.*** College staff have strong knowledge and skills in their fields, and they have the ability to provide leadership for change. Faculty are excellent teachers and use a learner-centered approach in the classroom. Vocational/technical faculty have experience working in their fields and credibility with industry. Appropriate staff are knowledgeable about the regional economy and have frequent interaction with employers. Staff development provides ample opportunity for continued learning, and there is frequent interaction and collaboration among college departments.

4. ***High quality programs.*** College programs are highly regarded by students, employers, and the community at large. Students master what they need to know to be successful in the workplace and in four-year college or university. The college monitors and evaluates its programs and strives for continuous improvement.

5. ***Ability to meet changing needs.*** Through its planning capacity, the college identifies and responds to trends in the regional and national economies. The college is able to shift its priorities and roles as regional needs change and new opportunities arise. For instance, it develops new curricula to meet the changing needs of individuals and employers.

6. ***Communication/public relations/fundraising ability.*** The college's programs and services are well known and valued throughout the region. Also, the college has the ability to raise funds the funds it needs from government, foundations, individuals, and corporate sources.

Institutional Culture

In addition to the above capacities, successful rural colleges have certain characteristics that can be considered part of their institutional culture. These characteristics include:

a. ***Support for innovation and risk-taking.*** To develop and sustain the capacities described above, the college needs leadership that is open to new ideas and willing to overcome institutional inertia.

b. ***Becoming a "learning organization."*** Successful colleges encourage faculty and staff to ask questions and to learn from each other and from the community. They are continually on the lookout for effective practices from around the country and the world that can be adapted to fit the local situation. They seek the counsel of national experts and wise community members. They set aside time for reflection and planning. They look critically at themselves and ask, "How can we improve?"

c. ***Emphasis on equity and excellence.*** The college sets high standards and provides the support needed to help all students succeed. It has not only an "open door" but a system for bringing the disadvantaged through that door and supporting them along a path to stable careers. It encourages other educational institutions and employers to do the same.

d. ***Rootedness in local culture.*** Rural America is rich in cultural traditions. Preservation and celebration of traditional arts, languages, and other cultural practices is an increasingly important goal guiding development efforts in many regions, and the community college is an ideal institution to lead these efforts. Integrating local culture into the curriculum also helps students succeed in college by affirming their cultural identity. A faculty and staff that reflects the racial and ethnic makeup of the local population helps make the college a welcoming, supportive place for all students.

A Note on Presidential Leadership

The president's leadership style is a major factor in setting the institutional culture of the college and in building the capacities described above. RCCI presidents have described several qualities that they believe are helpful in leading their colleges toward RCCI goals.

The president:

- Has a vision for a brighter future for the region's people and economy.
- Is committed to a process of college engagement with the community, and can mobilize college faculty and staff to participate in that process. Encourages partnerships among the college, employers, economic development agencies, public schools, and others.
- Is personally involved in regional affairs, forging strong connections with other community leaders.
- Welcomes change, encourages initiative, and willingly takes risks to further the economic and educational transformation of the region.
- Models inclusive, collaborative leadership that empowers others at the college to take action. Encourages and rewards bottom-up creativity.
- Supports vigorous professional development for faculty and staff.

A Process for College-Community Collaboration

There are many examples of rural colleges — RCCI grantees and others — that perform several or more of the educational and economic development roles laid out in this paper. Some colleges operate one-stop employment and training centers; others offer assistance to small businesses. Some reach out aggressively to middle and high school students; others provide outstanding services to low literacy adults. Likewise, there are rural colleges that would score high on many of the institutional capacities described in this paper.

For every college, however, RCCI poses a challenging vision — that of working in partnership with other community institutions to further economic progress and expand educational access. To help achieve that vision, RCCI offers colleges a process that can strengthen collaboration with the range of institutions required to advance economic and educational opportunity. Besides benefiting the region, this collaborative process can also strengthen the college's own institutional capacity and help expand its role in economic development and educational access.

The RCCI process is based on a model for community and institutional change that has proven effective in a variety of settings. It relies on leadership by a college-community team. It includes an intensive planning and implementation process that is grounded in the principles expressed in this conceptual framework document.

College-Community Collaboration

By its very nature, RCCI demands collaboration. No one individual or agency can bring about the transformation of a rural economy, nor can one institution alone provide full access to education.

Regional development is best achieved through joint efforts of the public and private sectors and cooperation among neighboring towns and counties. This calls for involvement of business leaders, local government officials, public school administrators, economic developers, and other public and private sector leaders from different places in the region.

To ensure that economic development and access strategies are targeted effectively to poor people, another set of organizations needs to participate in RCCI planning and implementation. These include grassroots organizations, human service agencies, churches, and other community groups that represent or work closely with populations in need.

Why Teams?

As a way of stimulating collaboration among all the above organizations and interests, the RCCI process relies on a broad-based, college-community team to lead planning and implementation efforts. Team members include the college president, administrators and faculty, along with representatives of local business, government, public schools, and community-based organizations. The team may also include students and others who use the services of the college.

The RCCI team is not a short-term task force created just to plan and spin off projects. It is a long-lived committee charged with planning RCCI initiatives, overseeing their implementation, and continually scanning the horizon for new opportunities to achieve its vision. Team membership may change over time as RCCI priorities evolve, but the team remains active in providing leadership.

RCCI colleges are urged to use a team-led approach for several reasons. First, by participating together as team members, college and community representatives open new avenues for collaboration. Second, the work of institutional and community change requires a critical mass of innovators. The team can provide a "home base" for a core group of individuals with a shared vision for their region. Team members provide support for each other, and their enthusiasm and energy spreads outward to engage others in the college and the community.

A broad-based team by its very nature gathers diverse perspectives and deploys multiple talents. It facilitates cross-disciplinary learning, which can spark creative solutions to long-standing problems. Finally, at its best, the RCCI team models an important process that characterizes healthy, economically successful communities — an inclusive approach to decision-making. When seeded by RCCI, this process can spread to other community endeavors.

Private business increasingly uses inter-disciplinary teams to spearhead internal change efforts. Colleges, like traditional corporations, are accustomed to a hierarchical leadership structure and often find team-led efforts challenging to institute. However, RCCI colleges that have used teams have found the payoff is high. The benefits go beyond just planning and implementation of RCCI activities. In a sense, the process becomes a product in its own right. Strong college-community teams have helped RCCI colleges become more responsive to community needs and have strengthened the college's place in the community. And by nurturing relationships among community leaders who had not worked together closely in the past, RCCI teams have helped build social capital, part of the foundation for a strong community.

Moving from Vision to Action

The RCCI is not about mechanistic replication of a predetermined set of strategies or programs. Rather, it helps create a climate of innovation where commitment to RCCI goals can be carried out in locally determined ways. Demonstration sites follow a process that takes them from "vision to action."

The impetus for change in RCCI is driven by the dissonance between people's hopes and dreams and the current practices and priorities of their college and community. Teams articulate their vision for educational access and a thriving economy, and then they examine how closely the community and the college match that vision. The dissonance that often results is a powerful stimulus for change.

The journey begins with an intensive planning process in which the team uses data to analyze the "current state" at the college and in the region. It then assesses the college's strengths and capacity to promote economic development and improved educational access. Based on its assessment of problems and opportunities, the planning team creates a vision and specific goals.

The planning team then explores strategic alternatives, which may include new initiatives of the college and joint college/community efforts. Team members seek out the best programmatic ideas from around the country, and adapt them to fit local circumstances.

After developing their plans, RCCI colleges receive modest implementation grants to support initiatives in economic development, educational access, and institutional capacity-building. Typically, RCCI funds support staff positions, staff development, and convening of regional meetings; teams are encouraged to leverage money from other sources for operation of new initiatives. The team continues meeting regularly to monitor progress. It modifies and expands the RCCI plan based on its learnings. It strives to institutionalize successful RCCI efforts, weaving them into the fabric of the college and the community for long-lasting impact.